

**IN THE CLAIMS****PLEASE AMEND THE CLAIMS AS FOLLOWS:**

1. (currently amended) An apparatus for providing information in response to a query of a virtual database table, the apparatus comprising:

a virtual database service comprising the virtual database table, wherein the virtual database table comprises one or more rows and each of the one or more rows comprises one or more fields; and

an information source comprising the information to be provided in response to the query of the virtual database table, wherein the information source comprises an access evaluator configured to determine whether a user may have access to an information resource within the information source, the query comprising a field name and an indication of manner for selecting a row, and wherein the virtual database service is configured to:

receive the query;

respond to the field name and the indication of the manner for selecting a row as required to obtain the information to be provided from the information source; and

provide the information as a value of the field indicated by the field name in the selected row, in response to the query.

2. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the indication of the manner of selecting a row comprises a selection value and the information source provides at least one component of the information to be provided in response to a match between the selection value and a pattern that matches a plurality of values and is accessible to the information source.

3. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein:  
the query is an SQL query addressing the virtual database table;  
the field name is contained in a SELECT clause in the query; and  
the indication of the manner of selecting a row is contained in a WHERE clause  
in the query.
4. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the manner of selecting a row comprises information identifying the information resource within the information source and the user seeking access to the information resource; and the provided information in response to the query comprises an indication of whether the identified user may access the information resource.
5. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the access evaluator determines whether the user may have access to the information resource by considering one or more access policies, each access policy indicating whether a user group may have access to a set of information resources, the access evaluator configured to allow access by the user to the information resource when the one or more access policies for the user groups to which the user belongs permit access to the sets of information resources to which the information resource belongs and the manner of selecting a row comprises membership information about the user from which membership of the user in a user group may be determined.
6. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the access evaluator uses the membership information to determine membership of the user in a user group.

7. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 6, wherein:

the access evaluator determines that the user's membership in the user group permits the user access to the information resource; and  
the provided information in response to the query further indicates a method of providing further information about the user in a further query from which the user's membership in a user group can be determined.

8. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the further information comprises authentication information that may be used to validate the user's identity.

9. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising an additional information source configured for use as an authenticator, wherein the authentication information is used to validate the user's identity.

10. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein a response to the further query provides an indication whether the user's identity is valid with regard to accessing an information resource.

11. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising an additional information source configured for use as a user profile information source that provides additional information about the user, wherein the additional information about the user comprises a user information retrieval method specification that specifies how the user profile information source provides the additional information, and wherein the access evaluator considers at least some portion of the additional information to determine membership of the user in the user group.

12. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising an additional information source configured for use as an authenticator that validates the identity of the user through use of the membership information, wherein the access evaluator determines membership of the user in a user group only after the authenticator has validated the user's identity.
13. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising an additional information source configured for use as an authenticator that validates an identity of the user through the use of authentication information in the indication of a manner of selecting a row, wherein the provided information in response to the query is obtained at least in part from the authenticator, the provided information comprising an indication of whether the user's identity is valid.
14. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising an additional information source configured for use as a user profile information source that provides additional information about the user through the use of profile information gathering information that indicates to the profile information source how to gather the profile information, wherein the indication of the manner for selecting a row comprises the profile information gathering information, wherein the provided information in response to the query is obtained at least in part from the profile information source, the provided information comprising the profile information.